

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the privilege of presenting testimony in support of S.1658, legislation authorizing construction of The Reconciliation Place in Fort Pierre, South Dakota, to serve tribal people and the general public.

I am Bill Fischer, a third generation South Dakotan. My grandfather homesteaded in Central South Dakota in 1884. My family has dealt with tribal people since then, primarily from the stand point of a general store and banking. I currently am President of the American State Bank in Pierre, South Dakota, an \$80,000,000 bank primarily devoted to agriculture. For years we have dealt with tribes and tribal people, both as a depository and a source of lendable funds.

For nearly 14 years I have been involved with this project supporting the diligent and sensitive leadership of our chairman, Clarence Mortenson, an enrolled member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe.

The other key leader of this effort is Mike Jandreau, Chairman of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe. His notable leadership ability is evidenced by his role as Chairman at Lower Brule for several years.

These two gentlemen and other involved tribal leaders have brought cultural sensitivity to this project. That is an important point.

A second important point is the significant local support for this project as evidenced by statement of support from:

Senator Daschle
Senator Tim Johnson
Congressman John Thune
Governor Janklow
former Governor Mikkelson
the State Bar Association
the State Chamber of Commerce
the State Retailers Association
the Mayors of the cities of Ft. Pierre and Pierre communities

the County Commissioners of the relevant local counties

Notable, too, is the fact that nearly 80 acres of land have been acquired from private individuals and public entities to become a site for this Reconciliation Place, which property is owned by the Wakpa Sica Historical Society, Inc., the nonprofit organization that sponsors this inclusive project.

It is located on the west bank of the Missouri River, at the site where Lewis and Clark met Sioux Tribal leaders in 1804, and artist George Catlin conceived the idea for the establishment of National Park Service. It is also within sight of the Verendrye Monument where in 1743 three French explorers buried a lead tablet to claim this region for France – that tablet still exists today. This site has always been a peaceful site and a significant place in the history of the Sioux Nation and interaction with explorers.

The six major thrusts of this project promise significant services for the Sioux Tribes of North Dakota, South Dakota and Nebraska, to the extent they choose to use those services. The point is that tribal participation's will be at the discretion of each tribe. Notably, leaders of ten of the eleven Sioux Tribes have gone on record in support of this project.

The need to upgrade, expand and extend support for **TRIBAL LEGAL SYSTEMS** is a key of this project. We are pleased to have the participation of the University of South Dakota Law School and the University of North Dakota Law School to help research needed legal improvements to aid those court systems. Establishment of a Sioux Nation Tribal Supreme Court can bring a disciplined commonality of reporting and interpretation that can build awareness and confidence of all persons involved in economic activities on reservations. We are committed to making this part of the project a system that all 11 tribal governments and their people can be proud of, is culturally sensitive, and offers alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, relevant to the culture. This result can improve the effectiveness of the economic development effort that is part of this bill.

Another key area of the project is the **LEWIS AND CLARK CENTER** to interpret the visit from the perspective of tribal people, as was noted in the June 1997 letter of Mr. Richard N. Williams, Manager of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail System of the Department of the Interior. This will be the only center from the Tribal standpoint on the entire Lewis and Clark Trail.

The establishment of a **REPATRIATION CENTER for the Sioux Nation**, to provide administrative and interpretive services, plus physical storage/transfer for sensitive cultural, spiritual and funerary objects is a need of growing urgency in the minds of Sioux Tribal leaders, especially for those whose exact origin has not been determined.

Another area that is to be addressed in the center is **SHIUX NATIONAL ARCHIVES** – where tribal people can research their genealogy. This currently can only be done by travelling to St. Louis, Missouri, Denver, Colorado or Salt Lake City, Utah.

A world class **CULTURAL MUSEM** dedicated and exclusively to Sioux will be an additional significant part of the Reconciliation Place.

And finally, plans call for an area of this complex to be devoted to **NATIVE AMERICAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**. This is an especially important issue with the current unemployment exceeding 50 percent on most reservations.

The multiple missions of this project are essential, and offer profound promise to build reconciliation among all peoples. Our hope for reconciliation drives the leaders of this project to strive for reconciliation among peoples of this nation. Our sincere thanks to Senator Daschle and his staff for their help bringing our dreams to your attention and consideration.

Thank you for the privilege of testifying.

Respectfully submitted:

William V. Fischer

President

American State Bank